DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 266 341 CG 018 821

AUTHOR Frenza, Mary

TITLE Peer Counseling. Highlights: An ERIC/CAPS Fact Sheet.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Personnel Services, Ann Arbor, Mich.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 85
CONTRACT 400-83-0014
NOTE 3p.
AVAILABLE FROM ERIC/CAPS, 2108 School of Education, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Counselor Role; Counselor Training; *Peer Counseling; *Professional Personnel; Program Design; *Program Implementation

ABSTRACT

Peer counseling is defined and the rationale for using peer counselors is given in this factsheet. A discussion of the history and research on peer counseling is followed by a list of successful peer counseling program foundations. Other sections discuss the operating components of selection, training, supervision, and evaluation. The professional counselor's major responsibilities for peer counseling programs are identified. A short list of resource documents is included. (NRB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED266341

CG 018821

HIGHLIGHTS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

...An ERIC/CAPS Fact Sheet

Peer Counseling

Definition and Rationale

Peer counselors fall under the general rubric of paraprofessionals — those without extended professional training, who are selected from the group to be served, trained, and given ongoing supervision to perform some key function generally performed by a professional (Mamarchev, 1981). Frequently cited benefits from the use of peer counselors include: expanded services and reduced costs because professionals are freed for other duties; traditional counseling services enhanced by the unique abilities and skills of peer paraprofessionals; the opportunity to gain special insight into the needs and problems of the group being served; and a bridge for the gap between professionals and the diverse groups they serve. Peer counselors benefit from the specialized human relations training and the opportunity to help others, which contribute to their own personal growth and development.

History and Research

Although the initial policies of professional counseling associations toward the use of paraprofessionals emphasized clerical activities as their appropriate domain, more recent statements stress the value of peer facilitators' interpersonal skills and caution that they should not be used as clerical assistants (ASCA, 1984; Brown, 1974).

This increased acceptance of peer counselors in direct helping relationships is based on the results of research on paraprofessional effectiveness. Even though much of this research has been criticized for flaws of methodology and design, it nevertheless provides ample evidence that nonprofessionals with limited training (20-40 hours) can be as effective as professionals, in some areas, in bringing about positive client change (Hoffman & Warner, 1976; Scott & Warner, 1974).

In attempting to account for the effectiveness reported for peer counselors, researchers have examined differences in selection and training for paraprofessionals and professionals. While procedures for selecting peer counselors aim at identifying individuals who demonstrate empathy, high self-confidence, and the ability to accept values different from their own, selection in professional counselor training programs focuses on intellectual abilities which may not correlate with effective interpersonal skills. Peer counselor programs provide training in specific skills related to direct helping relationships. Professional training programs are often a mixture of science, art, research, and practice with limited time spent on interpersonal and facilitative skills (Brown, 1974).

Peer Counselor Programs

A successful peer counselor program is built on a solid foundation which includes:

- **Systematic needs assessment** — to determine whether peer counseling is the most appropriate or highest priority intervention.
- **Established support** — from all those affected by the program.
- **Specific rather than global program goals** — with written descriptions clearly defining roles, functions, and levels of responsibility.

Once the program's foundations have been laid important operating components — selection, training and supervision, and evaluation — must be implemented.

Selection

A preliminary step to the selection process is recruiting candidates from the population to be served. Whatever method is chosen to advertise for recruits, information on basic qualifications should emphasize: commitment to helping others and the ability to interact with a variety of people; willingness to accept standards of ethical conduct such as confidentiality of information; and willingness and ability to work within the philosophy and goals of the program (Delworth & Brown, 1977). Besides these basic qualifications, effective peer counselors have been found to possess the facilitative skills of empathy, genuineness, and respect for others.

Based on the assumption that the presence of these qualities indicates the individual can be trained to function as an effective helper, many selection procedures are designed to obtain information on candidates' present or pre-training levels of human relations skills. Biographical data sheets, objective personality measures, peer nominations, ratings of empathic responses to videotaped interactions, and references and recommendations are all examples of commonly used means to obtain this kind of information.

A second approach to selection directly assesses trainees' potential to benefit from training. The method involves the use of a brief training analog with pre- and post-testing of applicants' interpersonal skill levels, based on the idea that those who benefit from a small amount of training will more likely benefit from the whole (Delworth & Moore, 1974). The analog can be a small part of the actual training sequence.

A third approach, frequently used at the secondary school level, is self-selection, in which virtually everyone who applies to the program is accepted. In this case, a pre-training interview with a counselor to weed out those who are emotionally unstable, or a rigorous training process to discourage the uncommitted are the only screening devices.

Training

The content of peer counselor training usually covers three areas. The first is information about the policies, procedures, and organization of the program; ethical and legal considerations such as confidentiality; ways to establish a support network and sources of support; and the limitations of the peer counselor role, including signs which indicate professional help is needed and the procedures for referral. The second content area is job specific information, which relates to particular program objectives, e.g., to provide academic advising, tutoring, career guidance, or group counseling. The third area is interpersonal skills training.

The goal of training in interpersonal skills is to enhance trainees' positive, helping responses by teaching listening

Educational Resources Information Center
Counseling and Personnel Services Clearinghouse
2108 School of Education, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109-1259 (313) 764-9492
1985

ERIC®

skills; awareness and understanding of verbal and nonverbal behavior; self-disclosure and expression of feeling; specific facilitative responses such as clarification, open questioning, and feedback; and strategies for establishing a nonthreatening environment.

The most effective process for training peer counselors includes both didactic and experiential techniques in a basic four-step sequence: (1) identifying and defining the skill in behavioral terms — breaking it down into small steps; (2) demonstrating or modeling both effective and ineffective examples of the skill; (3) practicing the skill with supervision and feedback until minimum competence is achieved; and (4) practicing the skill with supervision in real counseling situations. Specific techniques for the training process include the use of videotapes for modeling and feedback, role playing, group discussion, and exercises in values clarification, problem solving, and decision making.

Because having a skill is no guarantee that one can teach it, the selection and evaluation of trainers is as important for program success as the selection of trainees. Training the trainers is often accomplished within the peer counseling program, using a pyramid approach in which more advanced peer counselors, under professional supervision, act as trainers. This method has the advantage of providing the more experienced with new skills and new trainees with models of effective peer helping. Other ways of ensuring effective trainers include professional development workshops for counselors, and prepackaged training curricula with accompanying trainers' manuals (Danish & Brock, 1974). Professional supervision of peer counselors, during training as well as in actual practice, is regular and ongoing.

Evaluation

The goals of evaluating peer counseling programs are: (1) to provide performance feedback to professionals and peers; (2) to determine if training goals are being met; (3) to provide data for program improvement; and (4) to increase credibility and ensure the program's continued support. The evaluation process should be built into the initial program design and measure the effects of the program on peer counselors, on the population being served, and on the climate of the school or agency. Evaluation methods need not involve sophisticated research methodology. Following are suggestions for some easily implemented approaches:

- **Pre-post method** — measures changes that occur during the program, e.g., changes in peer counselor self-concept or communication skills.
- **Control group method** — compares differences between program participants and nonparticipants, e.g., trained peer counselors' helping skills compared to a general group.
- **Self-report method** — uses checklists, rating scales, or questionnaires to determine how well a program is meeting its goals; e.g., peer helpees rate their satisfaction with the program (Dougherty & Taylor, 1983).

The effects of the program on school or agency climate can often be measured using readily available data, such as the number of clients seen or the number of program participants, or through informal interviews with teachers, parents or administrators. The results of evaluations should be communicated to all those involved in and affected by the program.

Professional Responsibility

Professional responsibility is a salient issue in using paraprofessionals as peer counselors, especially in elementary and secondary schools where such programs involve minors. In addressing this issue, McManus (1982) described a high school program using secondary students to provide school psychological services, and detailed elements of the program which were designed to act as legal safeguards:

- Thorough education of all concerned persons before implementation and throughout the course of the program.
- Verbal and written permissions from parents of both peer counselors and their potential clients.
- Gradual implementation of program elements, with data collection on functional or neutral areas followed by the introduction of sensitive areas.
- Training emphasizing paraprofessional limitations and guidelines for referring to professionals.
- Ongoing professional supervision.

The basic components of successful peer counseling programs, as described earlier, have developed in large part through the effort to guarantee ongoing professional responsibility. Professional counselors' major responsibilities for peer counseling programs were identified in the early 1970s (Allen, 1972). While not all of them are relevant to every program, they remain the core areas:

- **Overall program planning** — to design, implement and evaluate the peer counseling program.
- **Role definition** — to specify peer counselors' functions, expectations and limitations.
- **Training and supervision** — to devise a peer counselor selection plan, provide preservice and inservice training, and supervise on a continual basis.
- **Legal liability** — to establish clear levels of authority between professionals and paraprofessionals and explicit guidelines for referral to professionals.

Resource Documents

Allen, D. A. (1972, April). *Peer counseling and professional responsibility.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American College Health Association, Atlanta, GA. (ED 066 679)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA). (1984). *Position statement: Peer facilitating.* Alexandria, VA: Author.

Brown, W. F. (1974). Effectiveness of paraprofessionals: The evidence. *Personnel and Guidance Journal, 53*(4), 257-263. (EJ 018 858)

Danish, S. J., & Brock, G. W. (1974). The current status of paraprofessional training. *Personnel and Guidance Journal, 53*(4), 299-303. (EJ 018 866)

Delworth, U., & Brown, W. F. (1977). The paraprofessional as a member of the college guidance team. In A. Gortner, V. C. Jackson, & F. Riessman (Eds.), *Paraprofessionals in Education Today.* New York: Human Sciences Press.

Delworth, U., & Moore, M. (1974). Helper plus trainer: A two-phase program for the counselor. *Personnel and Guidance Journal, 52*(6), 428-433. (EJ 094 352)

Dougherty, A. M., & Taylor, B. L. B. (1983). Evaluation of peer helper programs. In R. P. Bowman (Ed.), *Elementary School Guidance and Counseling* (Special issue), *18*(2). (EJ 296 444)

Hoffman, A. M., & Warner, R. W. (1976). Paraprofessional effectiveness. *Personnel and Guidance Journal, 54*(10), 494-497.

Mamarchev, H. L. (1981). *Peer counseling. Searchlight plus: Relevant resources in high interest areas. No. 52+.* Ann Arbor, MI: ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Personnel Services. (ED 211 904)

McManus, J. L. (1982). Comprehensive psychological services at the secondary level utilizing student paraprofessionals. *Journal of School Psychology, 20*(4), 280-298. (EJ 277 736)

Scott, S. H., & Warner, R. W. (1974). Research in counseling. *Personnel and Guidance Journal, 53*(3), 228-231.

Mary Frenza
Assistant Director, ERIC/CAPS

This publication was prepared with funding from the National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. 400-83-0014. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of NIE or the Department of Education.